

CONAN THE
BARBARIAN

MARVEL COMICS GROUP™

17
AUG
02498

20¢
©

CONAN

APPROVED
BY THE
COMICS
CODE
AUTHORITY

THE BADDABIAN



THE DEVIL-GOD OF BAL-SAGOOTH!

CONAN THE BARBARIAN™

A CLASHING OF STEEL: SOUND TO
RIVAL THE BELLOWING OF SEA-BORN THUNDER...

SHRILL SCREAMS
OF DEATH:
CUTTING LIKE
SCYTHES THRU
THE ROAR OF
WAVES AND
WIND...

AND TOWERING
OVER ALL:

CONAN!

THE GODS OF BAL-SAGOOTH

**KILL
HIM!**

KILL THE
BARBARIAN--
AND THE OTHERS
WILL FALL LIKE
SHEEP BEFORE
THE BUTCHER'S
AXE!

STAN LEE PRESENTS: * ROY THOMAS * GIL KANE * RALPH REESE, INKER * ADAPTED FROM THE STORY BY:
5942 WRITER ARTIST * JAN COSTA, LETTERER * ROBERT E. HOWARD CREATOR OF CONAN

CONAN THE BARBARIAN is published by MAGAZINE MANAGEMENT CO., INC. OFFICE OF PUBLICATION: 625 MADISON AVENUE, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10022. Published monthly. Copyright © 1972 by Magazine Management Co., Inc., Marvel Comics Group, all rights reserved 625 Madison Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10022. Vol. 1, No. 17, August, 1972 issue. Price 20¢ per copy. No similarity between any of the names, characters, persons and/or institutions in this magazine with those of any living or dead person or institution is intended, and any such similarity which may exist is purely coincidental. Printed in the U.S.A. by World Color Press, Inc., Sparta, Illinois 62286. Subscription rate \$2.75 for 12 issues, Canada \$3.25, Foreign \$4.50.

DESPERATELY THEY FIGHT, THE CREWMEN
OF THIS DOOMED TURANIAN GALLEY...

BUT, THE PIRATES OF THE
INLAND SEA ARE A FIERCE
IF MOTLEY BUNCH...

CORSAIRS FROM ZINGARA...
NOMADS OUT OF ZAMBOULA...
DESERTERS FROM THE
WORLD'S BRIGHT NAVIES...

...EVEN ONE ARMORED FUGITIVE
FRESH FROM THE AQUILONIAN
ARMY...

BUT THEN,
THRU THE MAD
FRAY, A VOICE
THUNDERS
BEHIND
CONAN...

...WHO'S TRAVELED FAR,
TO DIE THIS NIGHT 'NEATH A
CIMMERIAN'S FLASHING
BLADE!

THE FLAT OF A GREAT
AXE PLAYS A MOMENT'S
TUNE ON HIS HARD
NORTHERN SKULL...

...AND THE WORLD COMES
CRASHING DOWN IN
FIRE-SHOT BLACK-
NESS!

CONSCIOUSNESS RETURNS
BUT SLOWLY...

...DECK
SWAYING,
HEAD
THROB-
BING...

...UNTIL, AMID HOWLING GALE AND TOSSING
BILLOWS, CONAN'S SQUINTING EYES
SUDDENLY BEHOLD...

YOU! YOUR
NAME IS--
FAFNIR!

I KNOW YOU
FROM SHADIZAR--
WHERE I SAW YOUR
OWN FELLOW-
THIEF RUN YOU THRU
LIKE A DOG!

BLACKRAT? THAT PIP-
SQUEAK COULD NEVER
THRUST A SWORD HARD
ENOUGH TO SPIT A
SPARROW.

WHICH IS
LUCKY FOR
ME--

--AND
THUS FOR
YOU,
LITTLE
MAN.



MY MEN WOULD HAVE **SLAIN** YOU WITH THE GALLEY'S CREW... AND LET ME SPARE YOU ONLY IF I BOUND YOU TO THE **MAST**.

NEVER MIND THAT...

WHERE ARE WE, REDBEARD?

ASK ME NOT...!



THE SHIP IS **CRIPPLED**, AND THIS CURSED STORM BLOWS US HELPLESSLY **ONWARD**.

NIGHTS LIKE THIS, I THINK PERHAPS I SHOULD HAVE STAYED HOME IN **VANAHEIM**, AFTER ALL!

YOU'RE-- A **VANIRMAN**!?



I'M A **CIMMERIAN**-- AND I'VE **FOUGHT** YOUR KIND, ON THE BORDERS OF **AESGAARD**!

SMALL MATTER **NOW**.

I NEED **MEN**! SWEAR TO HELP US STEER, AND I'LL **LOOSE** YOU.

HAH!

THE DAY I HELP A **VANIRMAN**, I'LL--



FAFNIR-- LOOK YE!

THE MIST! THE **WHITE MIST**!!



GODS OF THE NORTH-- **NO!** **NO!**

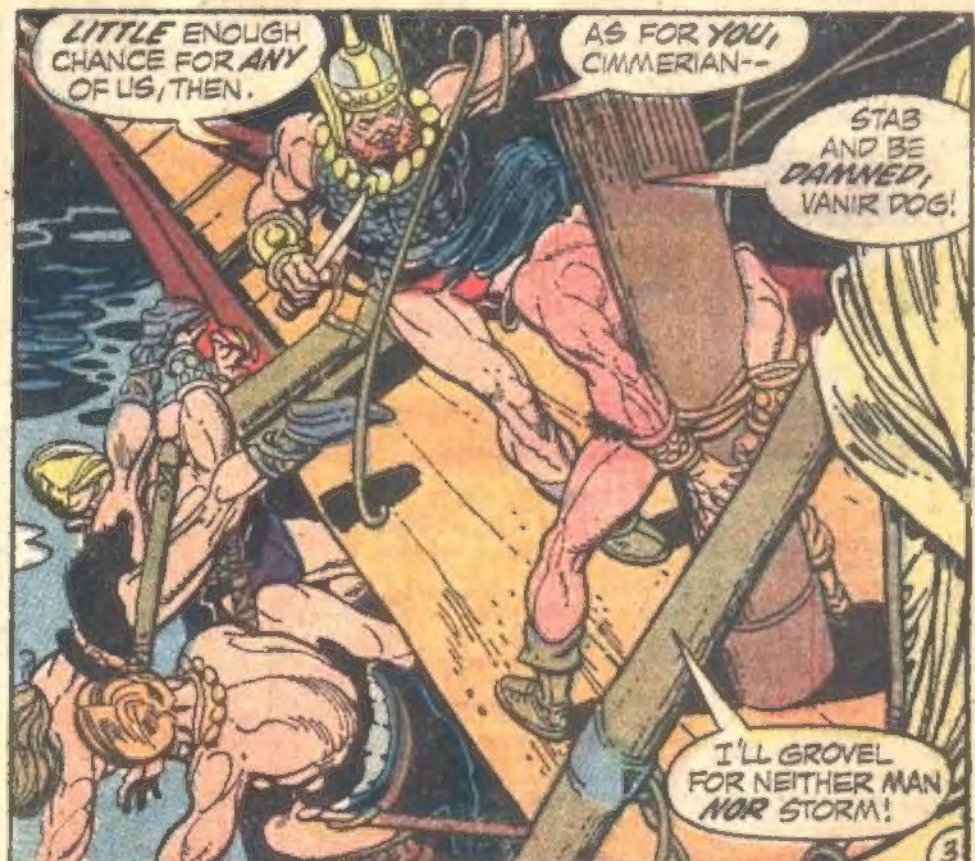
YOU'RE TURNING PALE WITH **FRIGHT**, MAN!

WHAT THE **DEVIL**--?



REEF, MATES! WE'VE STRUCK A **HIDDEN REEF**!

ABANDON SHIP! IT'S OUR ONLY **CHANCE**!!

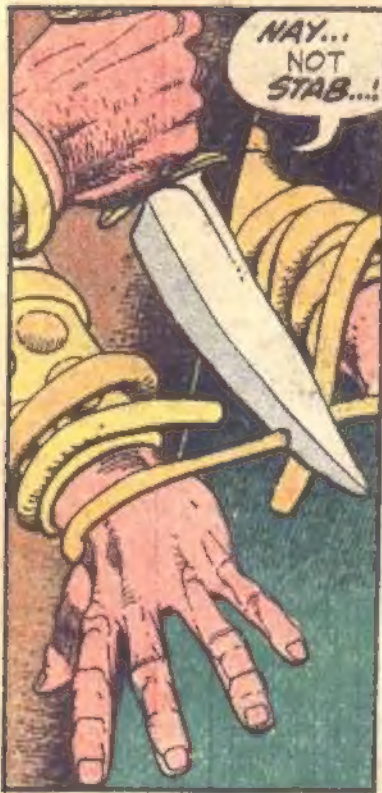


LITTLE ENOUGH CHANCE FOR ANY OF US, THEN.

AS FOR YOU, **CIMMERIAN**--

STAB AND BE **DAMNED**, **VANIR DOG**!

I'LL GROVEL FOR NEITHER MAN NOR **STORM**!



NAY...
NOT
STAB...!

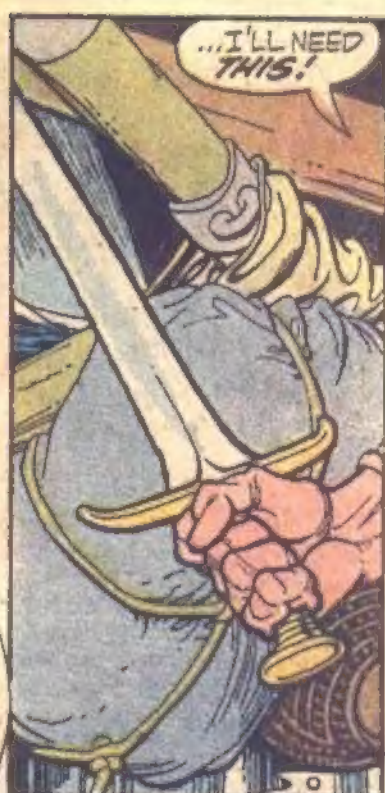


THERE! NOW,
RISK DAGON'S
CELLAR WITH
THE REST
OF US.

AND BE WARY!
THERE ARE
SHARKS IN
THESE
WATERS!

WELL?
HURRY,
LITTLE MAN--
BEFORE--

IN A
MOMENT,
REDBEARD.
WHETHER I'M
FATED TO CLASH
WITH SHARK,
OR WITH
BROAD-AXE...

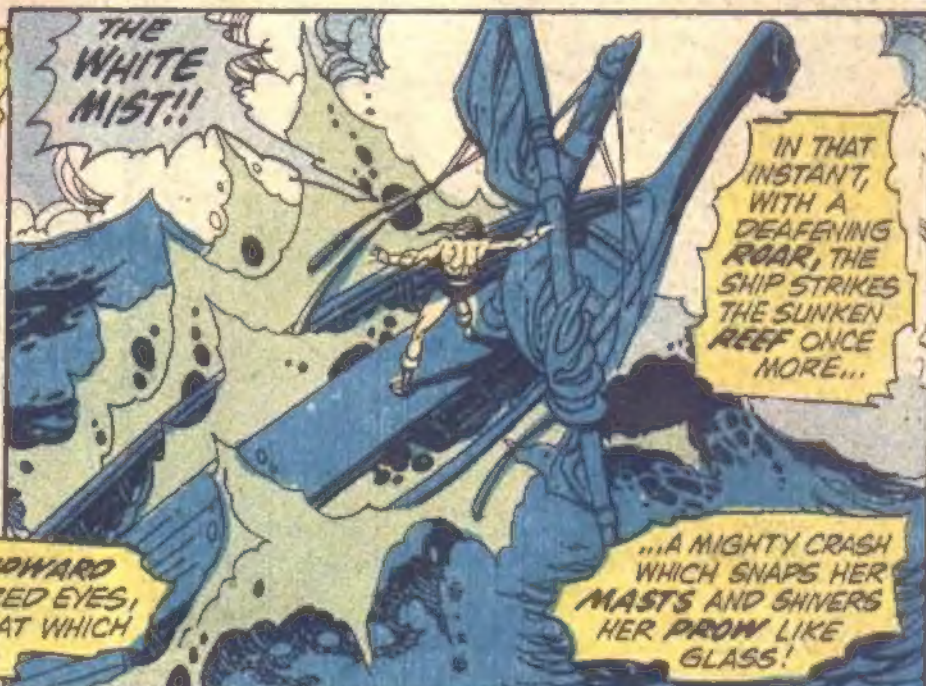


...I'LL NEED
THIS!



BUT THE GIANT
VANIR CANNOT
HEAR.

ALREADY,
HE IS
GONE...



THE
WHITE
MIST!!

IN THAT
INSTANT,
WITH A
DEAFENING
ROAR, THE
SHIP STRIKES
THE SUNKEN
REEF ONCE
MORE...

...A MIGHTY CRASH
WHICH SNAPS HER
MASTS AND SHIVERS
HER PROW LIKE
GLASS!



A MOMENT SHE REARS,
SHUDDERING LIKE A
LIVING THING...

...THEN
SLIDES
FROM THE
REEF, GOING
DOWN IN A
BLINDING
SMOTHER
OF SPRAY...

...EVEN AS A LONG
LEAP CARRIES THE
BARBARIAN CLEAR OF
THE DYING SHIP!



THE
WATERS CLOSE
ABOUT HIM, LIKE
THE JAWS OF
A RAVENOUS
DRAGON...

HIS
LUNGS
ACHE, NEAR
TO BURST-
ING...



AND THEN--
AIR!

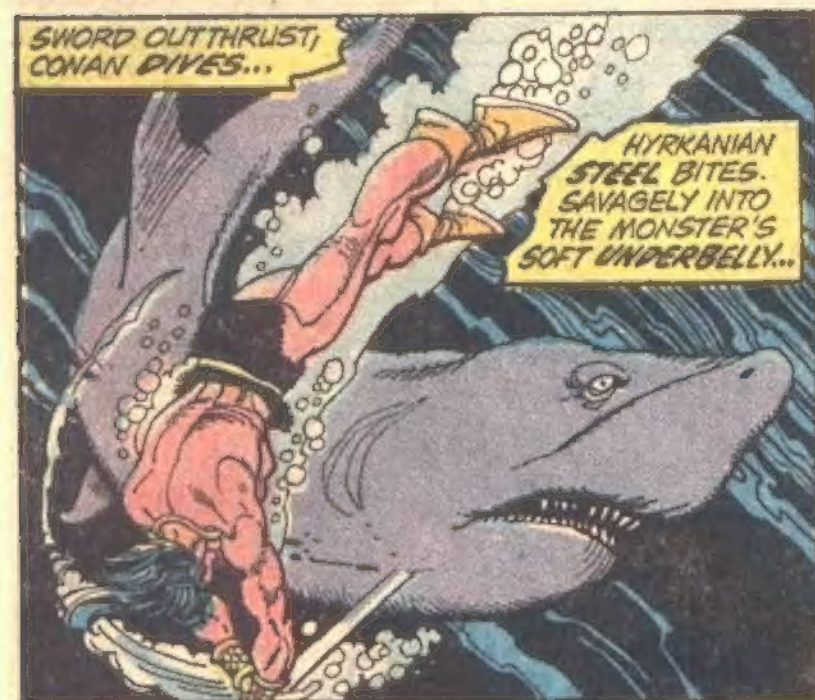
YET, IN THAT SELFSAME SECOND, HE
SPIES A PIECE OF **WRECKAGE**
TOSSED UP BY THE CHURNING WAVES...



...AS, SLUMPED ACROSS
IT, A **MAN** LIES LIMP...
ARM TRAILING...

...AND, CUTTING
THE SURFACE HERE
YARDS AWAY...

...A **LEAN**
AND **LETHAL**
FIN!



SWORD OUTTHRUST,
CONAN DIVES...

HYRKANIAN
STEEL BITES.
SAVAGELY INTO
THE MONSTER'S
SOFT **UNDERBELLY...**



AGAIN...

AGAIN...

...AND
YET
AGAIN...

...UNTIL A
CRIMSON
SLASH
STAINS THE
FACE OF
THE **DEEP!**



NO, FELLOW! YOU SAVED OLD
FAFNIR'S HIDE, AND THAT'S
FOR SURE.

HERE...!

IF I'D--
KNOWN--IT
WAS **YOU,**
VANIR--!

WELL--IT'S
DONE.

WE'RE **EVEN**
NOW. YOU SAVED
MY LIFE--I
SAVED **YOURS.**



TRUE ENOUGH--IF
YOU'RE KEEPING
SCORE,
BUT **LOOK!** WE'RE
INSIDE THE **MIST**--
WHERE NO MAN'S
EVER GONE, AND
LIVED TO TELL THE
TALE!

THAT--
SOUND--

LIKE SOME ROARING
LION, HALF-STARVED
OUT OF **KUSH--!?**



EASY TO TELL YOU WERE A
PASSENGER ABOARD THAT
GALLEY, AND NOT A
SEAMAN.

THOSE ARE
BREAKERS
YOU HEAR.

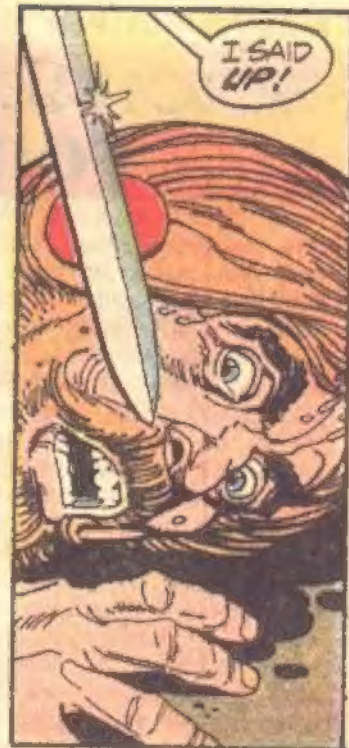
SEEMS THERE'S
AN **ISLE** WITHIN
THE **INFERNAL**
MIST...

AND
WE'RE
GOING TO
HIT HER
HARD!

BARE MINUTES LATER: DAWN'S GOLDEN EYE
PEERS OVER THE SEA-RIM, AS TWO BEDRAGGLED
FORMS STAGGER HALTINGLY TO SHORE...



UP,
VANIR-
MAN.



I SAID
UP!



BY YMIR, LITTLE
MAN--WE'VE NO
MORE CAUSE FOR
QUARREL, YOU
AND I.

THE HUNGRY
SEA DRANK
ALL BUT
US TWO,
AND--

AND SOON
ONLY *ONE*
WILL WALK
THIS SANDY
BEACH!

WHY?? ARE YOU
MAD, FELLOW?



ASK THAT OF THE
CORPSES YOU
VANIR LEFT BEHIND
YOU IN CIMMERIA,
ON THE DAY I WAS
BORN!

ASK IT OF THE
WOMEN, WHOSE
WAILS RING IN MY
EARS NIGHT
AND DAY!

GET
UP, DOG!



--OR, BY
CRAM, I'LL GUT
YOU WHERE YOU
KNEEL!



I'M UP, HOTBLOOD... BUT
I SWEAR BY BRAGI, THIS
IS NOT TO MY LIKING.

IT IS,
TO MINE.

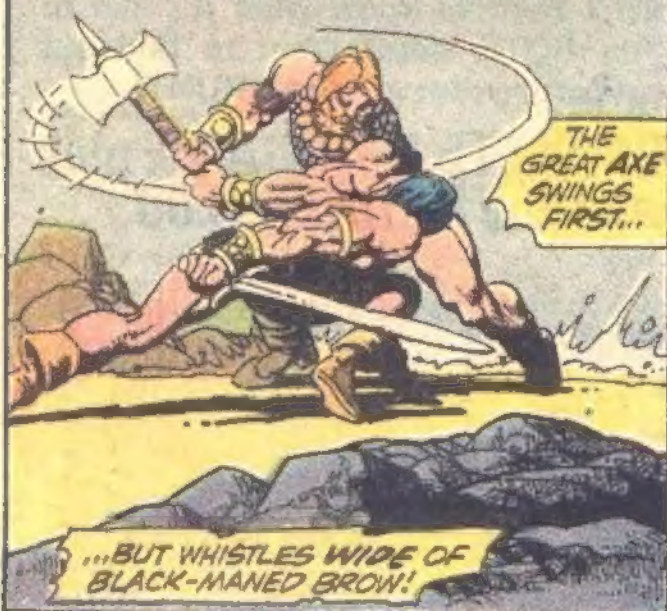
NOW DEFEND
YOURSELF,
DEVIL...



...AND
WOULD THAT ALL
OF VANAHEIM
HAD BUT A
SINGLE BREAST
FOR THIS SWORD
TO CLEAVE!

CONTINUED AFTER NEXT PAGE

NO MORE WORDS: CONAN CROUCHES PANTHER-LIKE, EYES ABLAZE...



THE GREAT AXE SWINGS FIRST...

...BUT WHISTLES WIDE OF BLACK-MANED BROW!

THE BLOODLUST IS UPON THE CIMMERIAN NOW... HE SLASHES WILDLY, RECKLESSLY...



YET THE VANIRMAN, FOR ALL HIS FAR-GREATER BULK...



...CAN MAKE NO HEADWAY WITH EVEN HIS MIGHTIEST STROKES!

THEN SUDDENLY, AMID THE CLANGOR, FAFNIIR LOWERS HIS AXE,...

FOOL! I FIGHT TO SLAY, NOT SLAUGHTER.

RAISE YOUR WEAPON!

NO, BY YMIR...



NO!

I WARN YOU--IF THIS IS SOME VANIR TRICK--



NO TRICK... BUT NO FIGHT, EITHER.

THE BATTLE IS ENDED!

AND, AS CONAN'S EYES MEET THE GIANT'S HALF-MIRTHFUL GAZE... AS HE GLIMPSES THE FAINT BEGINNINGS OF A RESPECTFUL SMILE WHICH CURL A WHISKERED LIP...

...THE BLOODLUST LEAVES HIM.

YOU ARE RIGHT, RED-BEARD.

THE BATTLE IS ENDED.



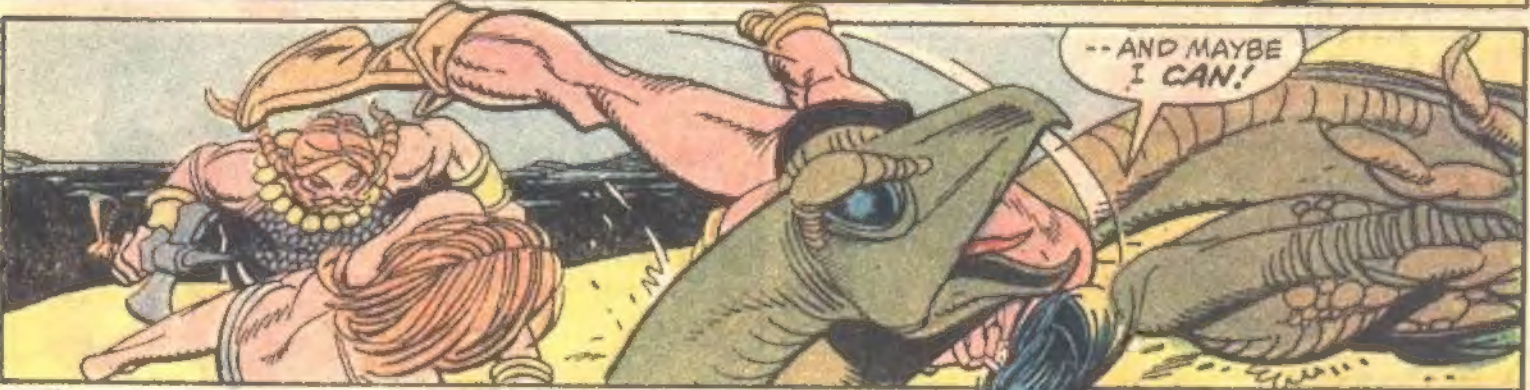
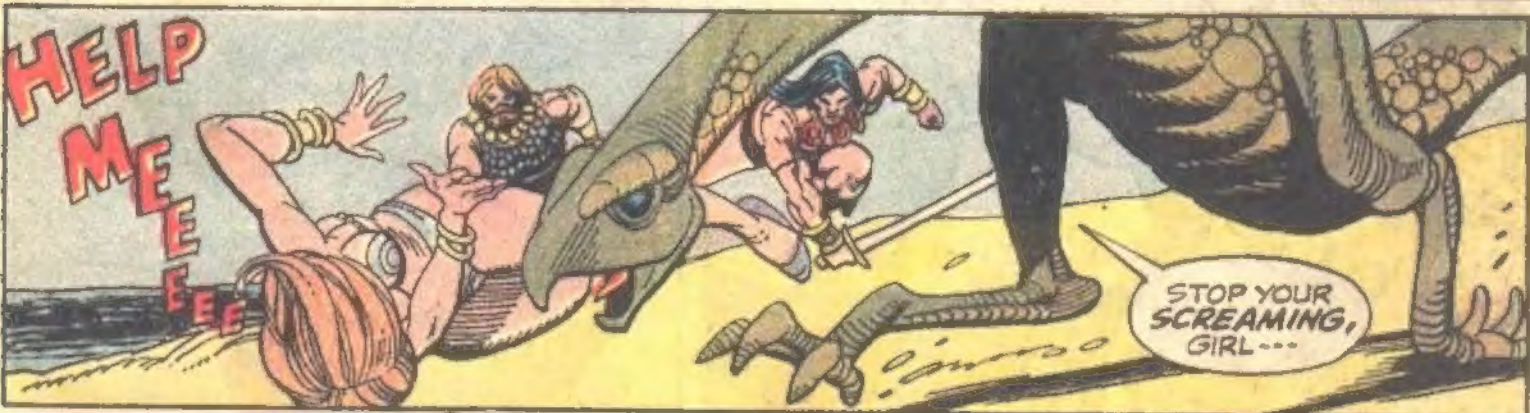
YMIR TAKE ME--I LIKE YOU, LITTLE MAN!

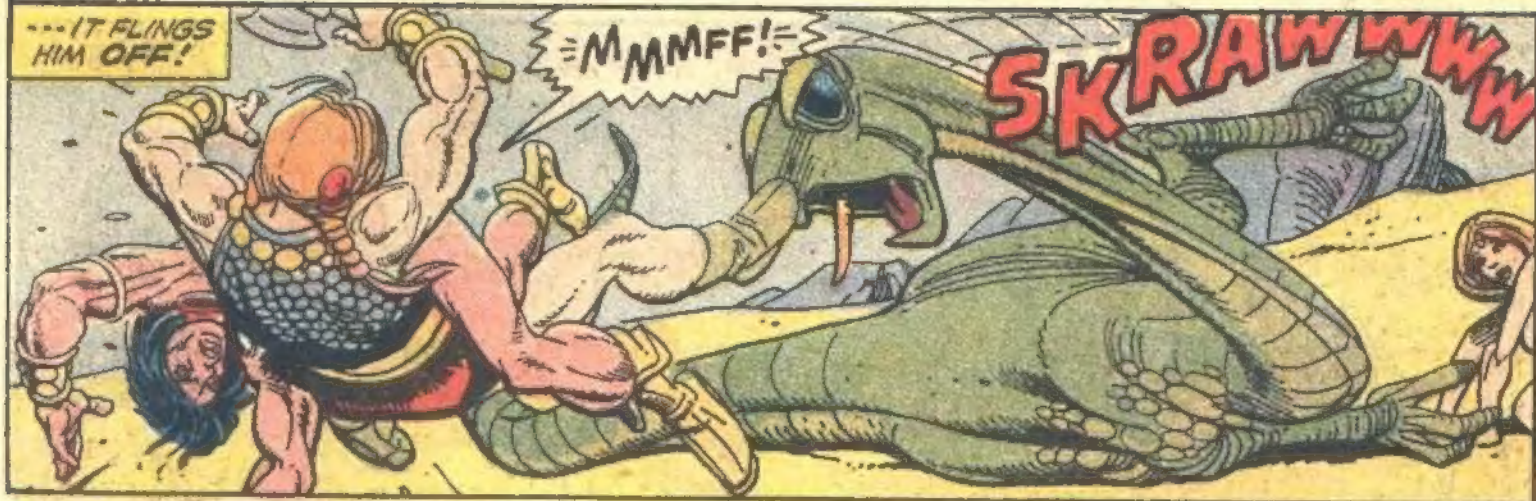
THEN LET ME GO, YOU GREAT OX...

AND DON'T CALL ME "LITTLE MAN"...

...OR YOU'LL START OUR BORDER-WAR ALL OVER AGAIN!







---IT FLINGS HIM OFF!

MMFF!

SKRAWWW



THAT'S IT, LITTLE MAN.

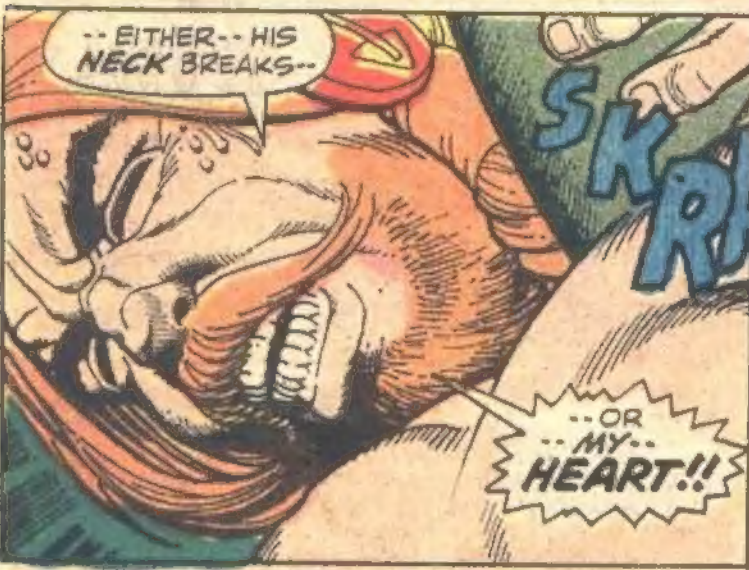
RUN LIKE A RABBIT, AND LEAD HIM PAST OLD FAFNIR...



AND BY BRAGI--

BY YMIR--

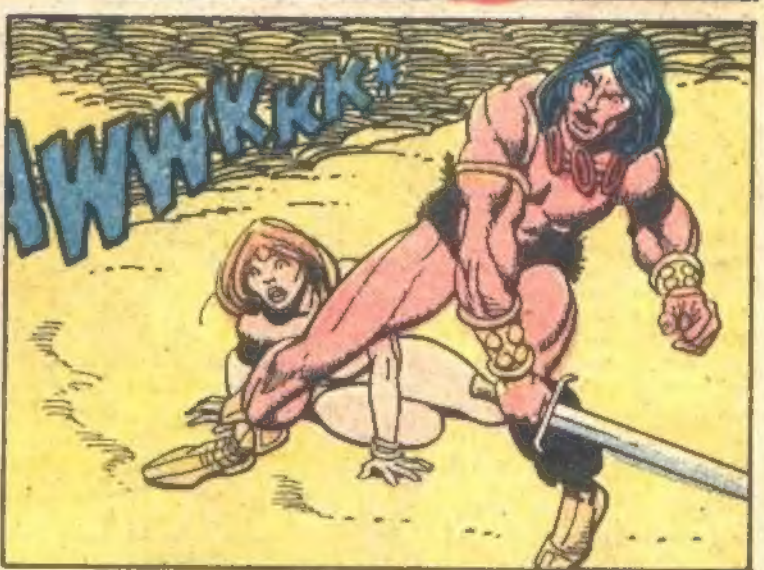
BY ALL THE GODS THERE ARE...



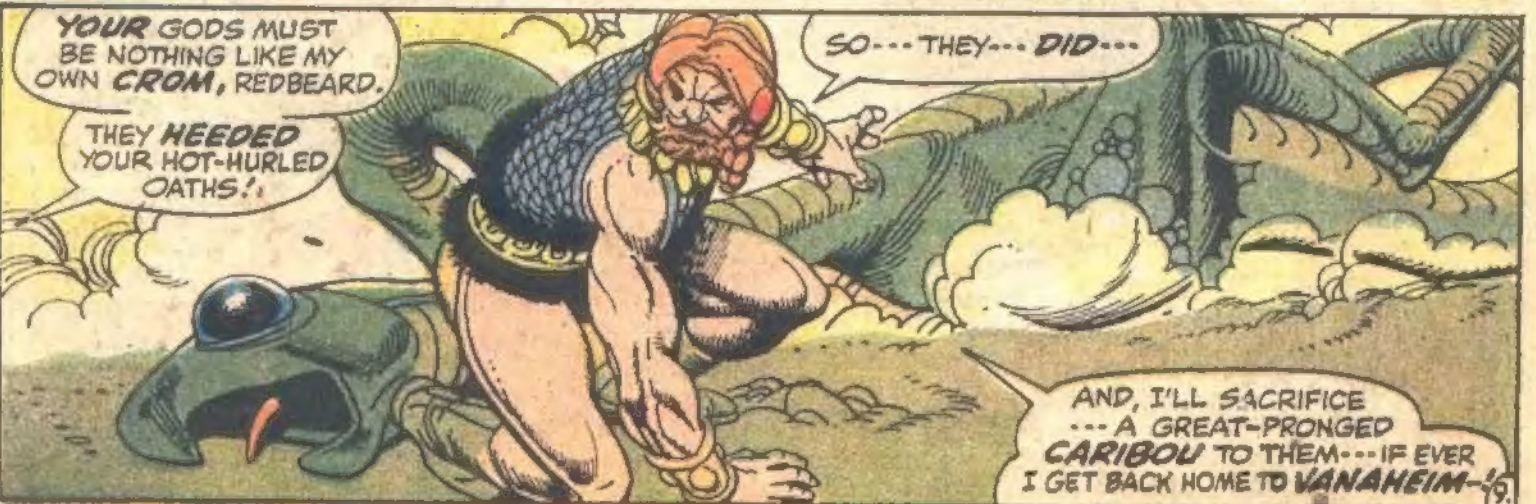
-- EITHER-- HIS NECK BREAKS--

SKRAWWW

--OR MY HEART!!



SKRAWWW



YOUR GODS MUST BE NOTHING LIKE MY OWN CROM, REDBEARD.

THEY NEEDED YOUR HOT-HURLED OATHS!

SO... THEY... DID...

AND, I'LL SACRIFICE --- A GREAT-PRONGED CARIBOU TO THEM--- IF EVER I GET BACK HOME TO VANAHEIM--!

CONTINUED AFTER NEXT PAGE

YOU'LL GET HOME, MAN, IF I HAVE TO CARRY YOU THERE MYSELF.

NOT LIKELY. BESIDES, IF YOU'D NOT WEAKENED HIS NECK, I'D NEVER HAVE CRACKED IT.

STILL, WHAT 'N--?

YOU! WHO ARE YOU MEN? WHENCE COME YOU?

WHAT DO YOU ON THE ISLE OF THE GODS?

I'VE SEEN NO GODS, WENCH!

JUST A DEVIL-BEAST SPAWNED IN HELL...

AND...

--A GIRL... OF PASSING BEAUTY.

YOU'LL MAKE A POET YET, CIMMERIAN. SHE IS A COMELY THING.

UNHAND ME, YOU GREAT VANIR OX!

YOU SPEAK WITH THE SAME VANIR ACCENT AS HE!

WHO ARE YOU -- AND WHAT LAND IS THIS?

BAL-SAGOTH! THE OLDEST LAND IN ALL THE WORLD!

HYRKANIA... KHITAI... EVEN SUNKEN ATLANTIS... ALL ARE AS INFANTS BESIDE IT.

AND I AM KYRIE, DAUGHTER OF RANE, CALLED THE REAVER.

RANE? I RAN WITH HIS BAND IN THE NORTH WHEN I WAS YOUNG.

HOW CAME HE... AND YOU... HERE?

LIKE SO...

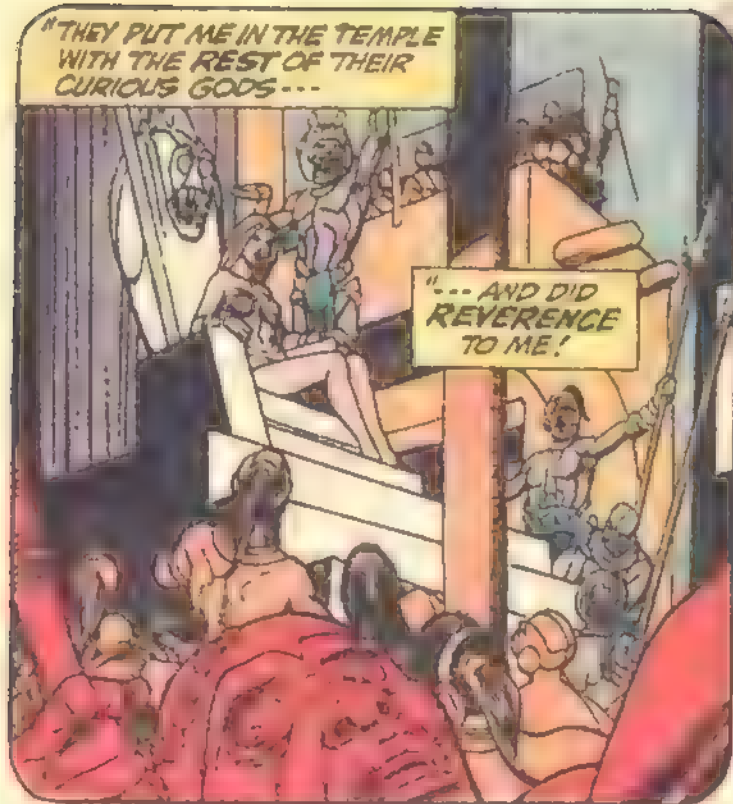
"YEARS PAST, HE'D HARRIED ALL THE LANDS HE KNEW..."

"THUS, WITH ME IN TOW, HE JOURNEYED EAST... BECAME A PIRATE AS WELL..."

"YET, HE PROVED NO MORE A MATCH FOR THE WHITE MISTS THAN MANY ANOTHER!"

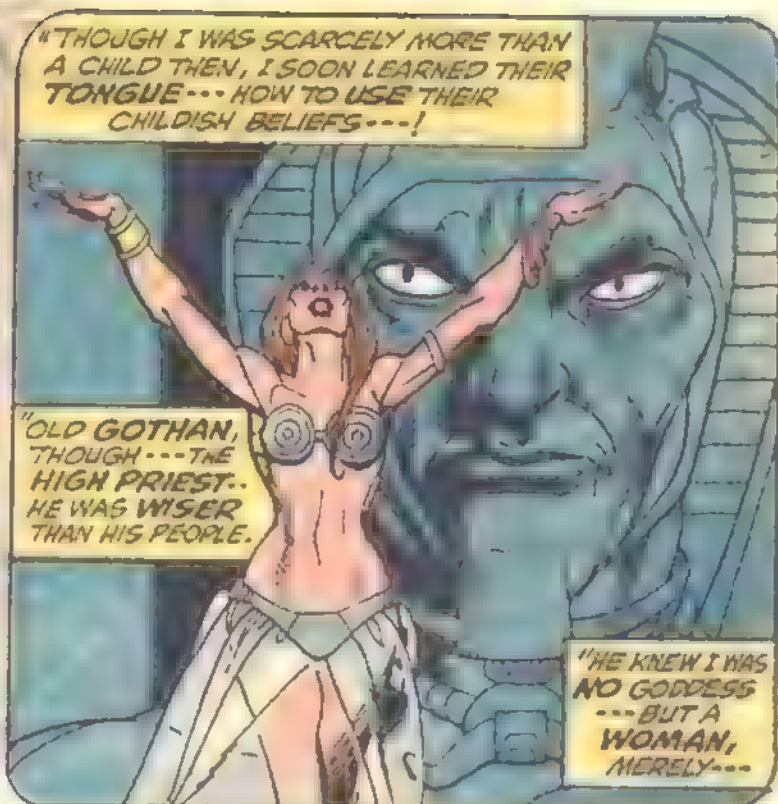
"A STORM WAS OUR UNDOING, AS YOURS... AND A WHIM OF THE GODS CAST ME ALONE ASHORE."

"THEIR SEA-GODDESS AALA HAS TRESSES SCARLET AS MY OWN... SO THEY THOUGHT I WAS SHE..."



"THEY PUT ME IN THE TEMPLE WITH THE REST OF THEIR CURIOUS GODS---

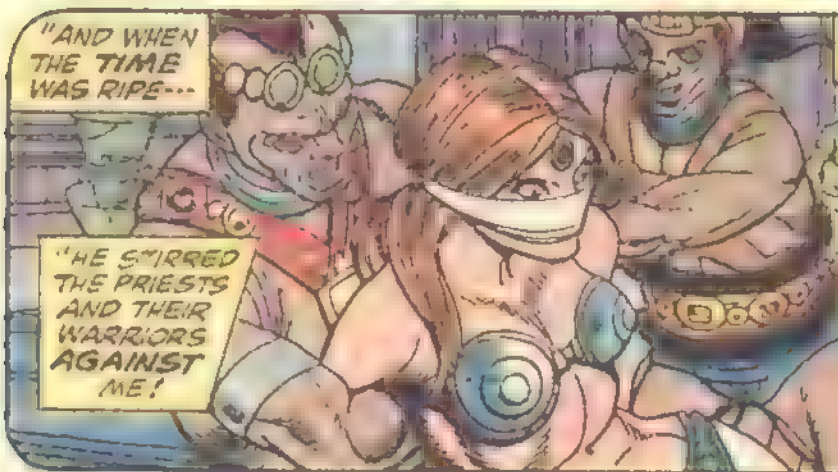
"...AND DID REVERENCE TO ME!"



"THOUGH I WAS SCARCELY MORE THAN A CHILD THEN, I SOON LEARNED THEIR TONGUE--- HOW TO USE THEIR CHILDISH BELIEFS---!"

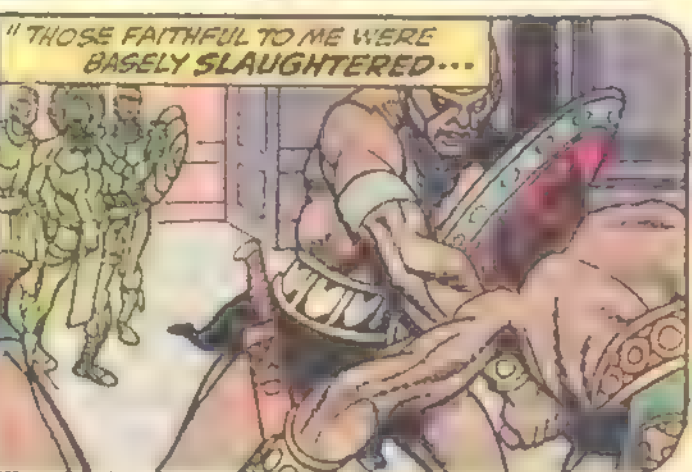
"OLD GOTHAN, THOUGH---THE HIGH PRIEST.. HE WAS WISER THAN HIS PEOPLE."

"HE KNEW I WAS NO GODDESS --- BUT A WOMAN, MERELY---



"AND WHEN THE TIME WAS RIPE---

"HE STIRRED THE PRIESTS AND THEIR WARRIORS AGAINST ME!"



"THOSE FAITHFUL TO ME WERE BASELY SLAUGHTERED---

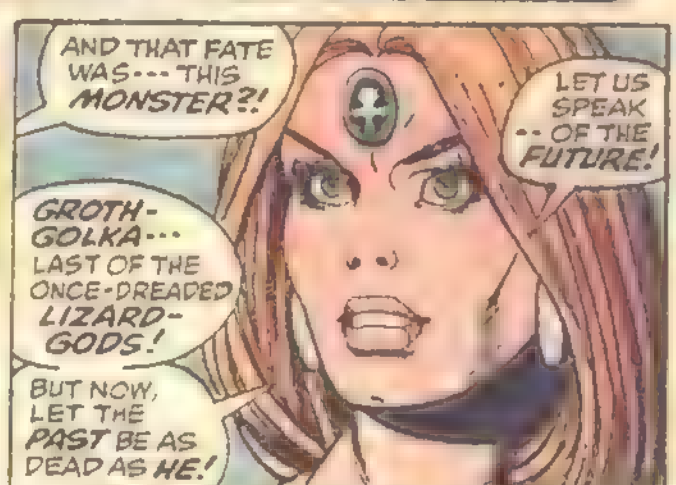


"BUT SOME STILL THOUGHT ME A GODDESS, SO GOTHAN DARED NOT SLAY ME."

"THEY ROWED ME HERE---

"---ACROSS THE LAGOON WHICH SPLITS THIS ISLE IN TWO--

"...AND LEFT ME TO MY FATE!"

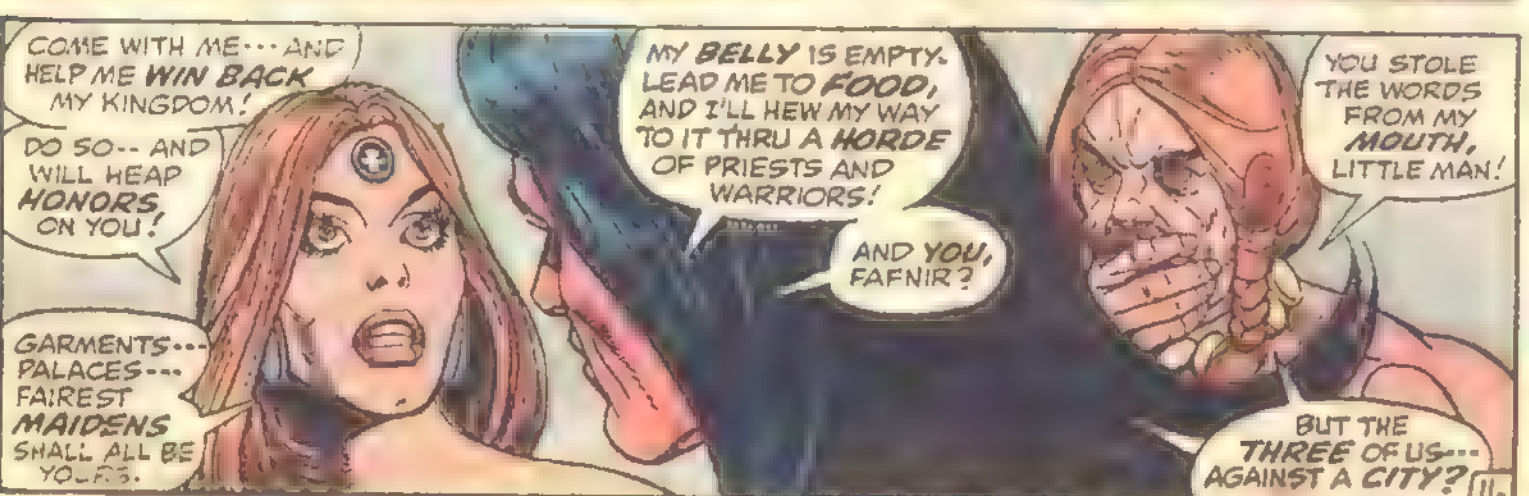


AND THAT FATE WAS--- THIS MONSTER?!"

LET US SPEAK -- OF THE FUTURE!"

GROTH-GOLKA--- LAST OF THE ONCE-DREADED LIZARD-GODS!"

BUT NOW, LET THE PAST BE AS DEAD AS HE!"



COME WITH ME--- AND HELP ME WIN BACK MY KINGDOM!"

DO SO-- AND WILL HEAR HONORS ON YOU!"

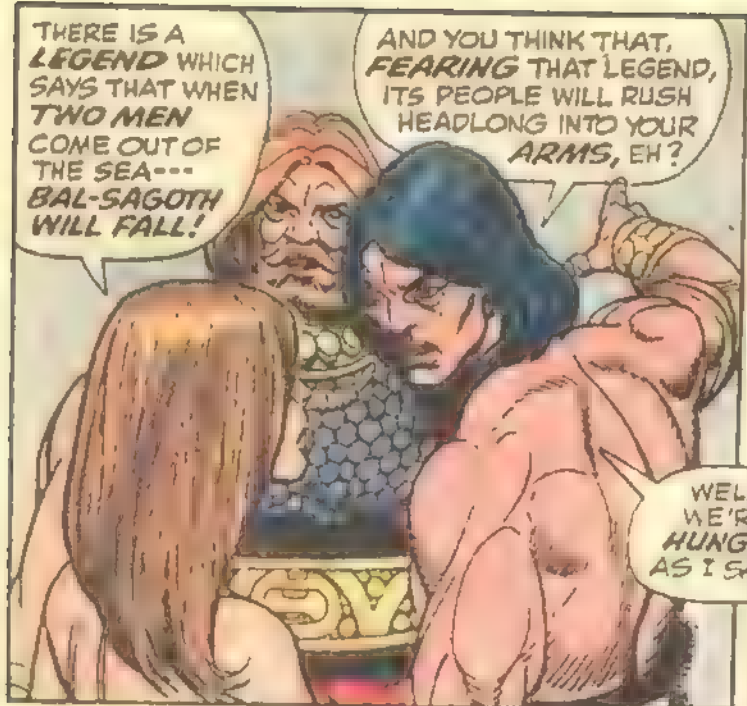
GARMENTS--- PALACES--- FAIREST MAIDENS SHALL ALL BE YOURS."

MY BELLY IS EMPTY. LEAD ME TO FOOD, AND I'LL HEW MY WAY TO IT THRU A HORDE OF PRIESTS AND WARRIORS!"

AND YOU, FAFNIR?"

YOU STOLE THE WORDS FROM MY MOUTH, LITTLE MAN!"

BUT THE THREE OF US--- AGAINST A CITY?"



THERE IS A LEGEND WHICH SAYS THAT WHEN TWO MEN COME OUT OF THE SEA--- BAL-SAGOTH WILL FALL!

AND YOU THINK THAT, FEARING THAT LEGEND, ITS PEOPLE WILL RUSH HEADLONG INTO YOUR ARMS, EH?

WELL, WE'RE HUNGRY, AS I SAID--



---SO LEAD ON!

HAH! NOW LET GOTHAN AND HIS PUPPET-KING TREMBLE!

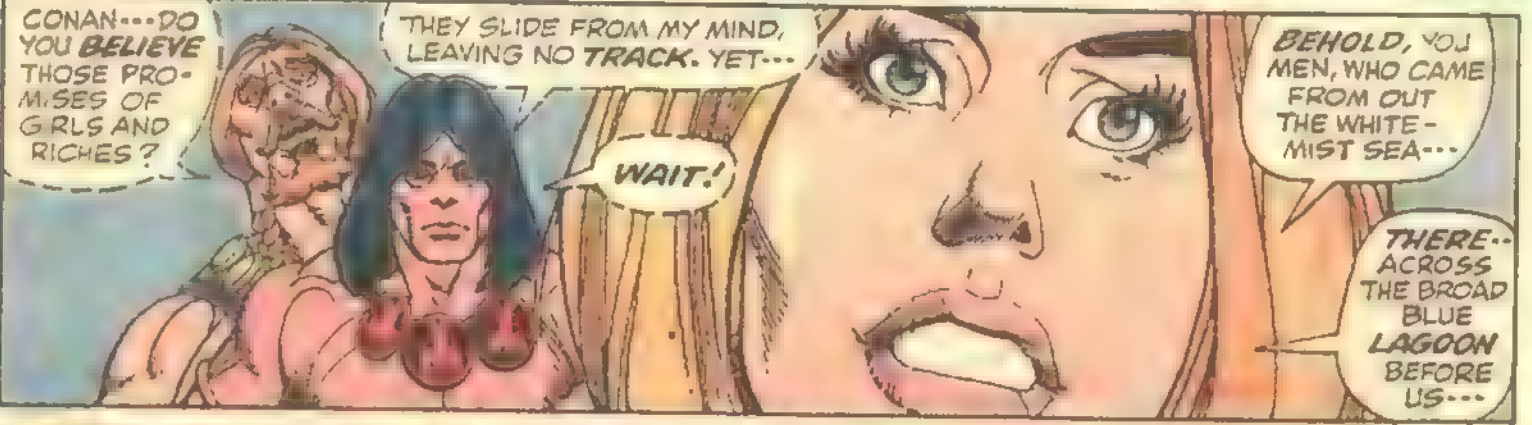
I'LL HURL THEM BOTH FROM THE HIGHEST BATTLEMENT, THOUGH THE BELLOWING OF THEIR DEMONS SHAKE THE EARTH ITSELF!

FOLLOW ME--- FOR I WOULD SLEEP IN MY OWN PALACE TONIGHT!



NOW, THE THREE PASS THRU THE SHADOWS OF AN ENCROACHING FOREST---

BUT THE GREAT BEASTS THERE, SURVIVORS OF ANOTHER AGE, DO NOT ATTACK.



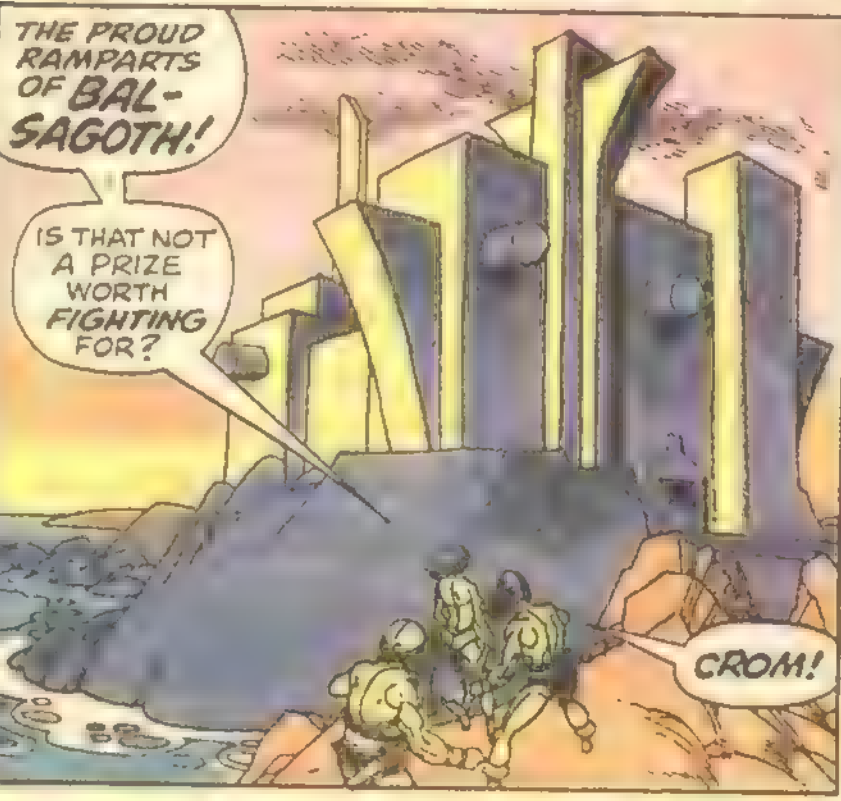
CONAN---DO YOU BELIEVE THOSE PROMISES OF GIRLS AND RICHES?

THEY SLIDE FROM MY MIND, LEAVING NO TRACK. YET---

WAIT!

BEHOLD, YOU MEN, WHO CAME FROM OUT THE WHITE-MIST SEA---

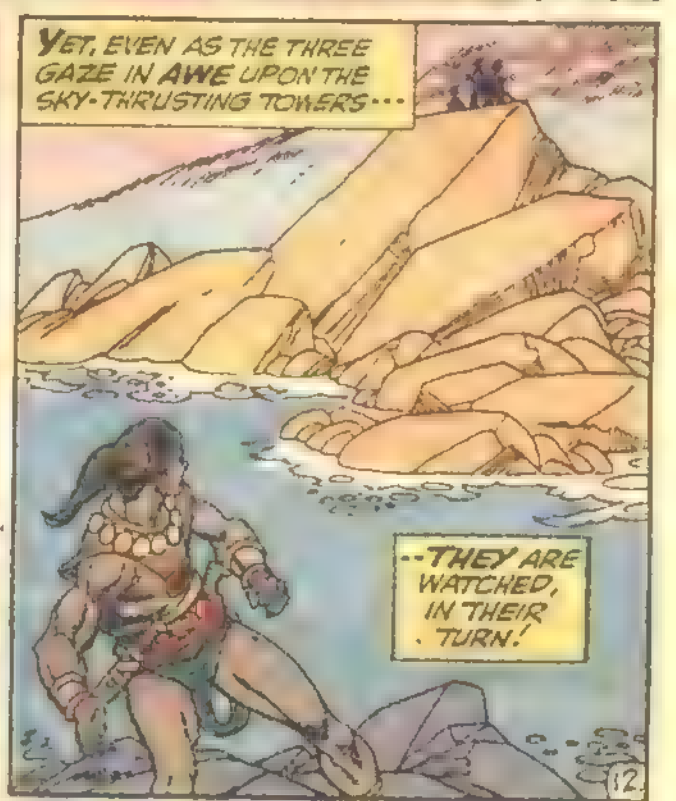
THERE--ACROSS THE BROAD BLUE LAGOON BEFORE US---



THE PROUD RAMPARTS OF BAL-SAGOTH!

IS THAT NOT A PRIZE WORTH FIGHTING FOR?

CROM!



YET, EVEN AS THE THREE GAZE IN AWE UPON THE SKY-THRUSTING TOWERS---

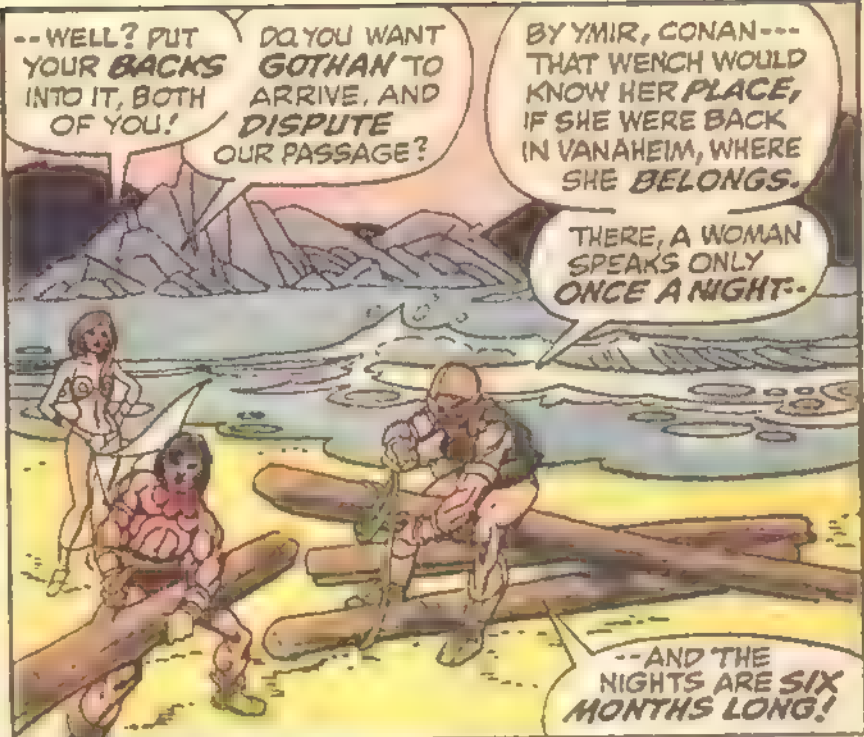
--THEY ARE WATCHED, IN THEIR TURN!



WHO'S THAT,
RUNNING OFF?

A SLAVE, LEFT TO
TELL GOTHAN IF I
SURVIVED THE
NIGHT.

SWIFT,
NOW-- MAKE A
RAFT! WE COULD
NEVER SWIM THESE
SHARK-HAUNTED WATERS.



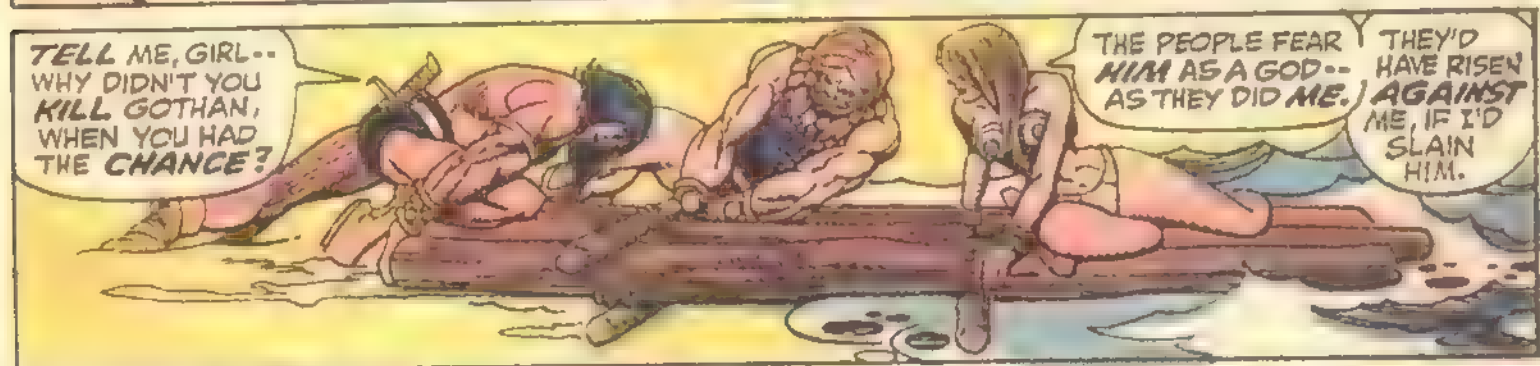
-- WELL? PUT
YOUR BACKS
INTO IT, BOTH
OF YOU!

DO YOU WANT
GOTHAN TO
ARRIVE, AND
DISPUTE
OUR PASSAGE?

BY YMIR, CONAN---
THAT WENCH WOULD
KNOW HER PLACE,
IF SHE WERE BACK
IN VANAHEIM, WHERE
SHE BELONGS.

THERE, A WOMAN
SPEAKS ONLY
ONCE A NIGHT--

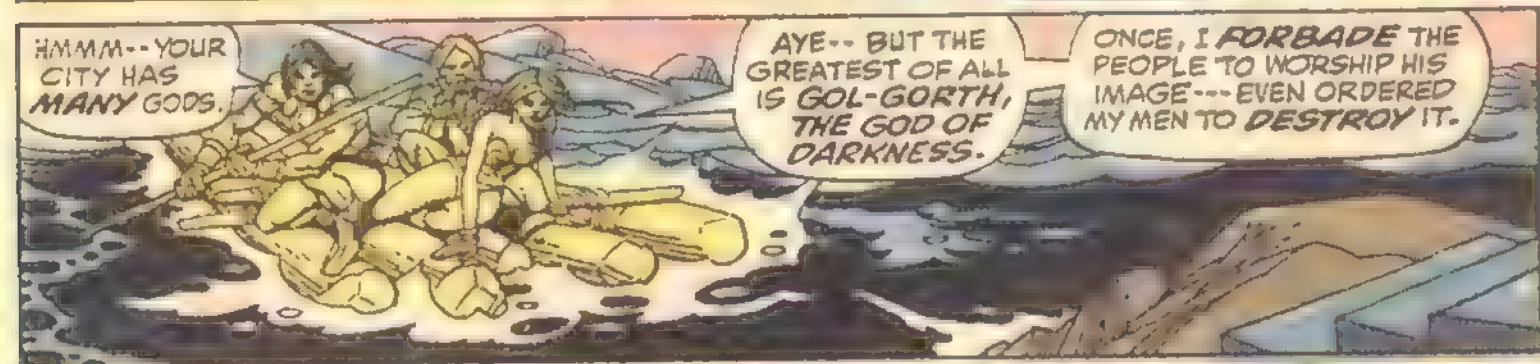
-- AND THE
NIGHTS ARE SIX
MONTHS LONG!



TELL ME, GIRL--
WHY DIDN'T YOU
KILL GOTHAN,
WHEN YOU HAD
THE CHANCE?

THE PEOPLE FEAR
HIM AS A GOD--
AS THEY DID ME.

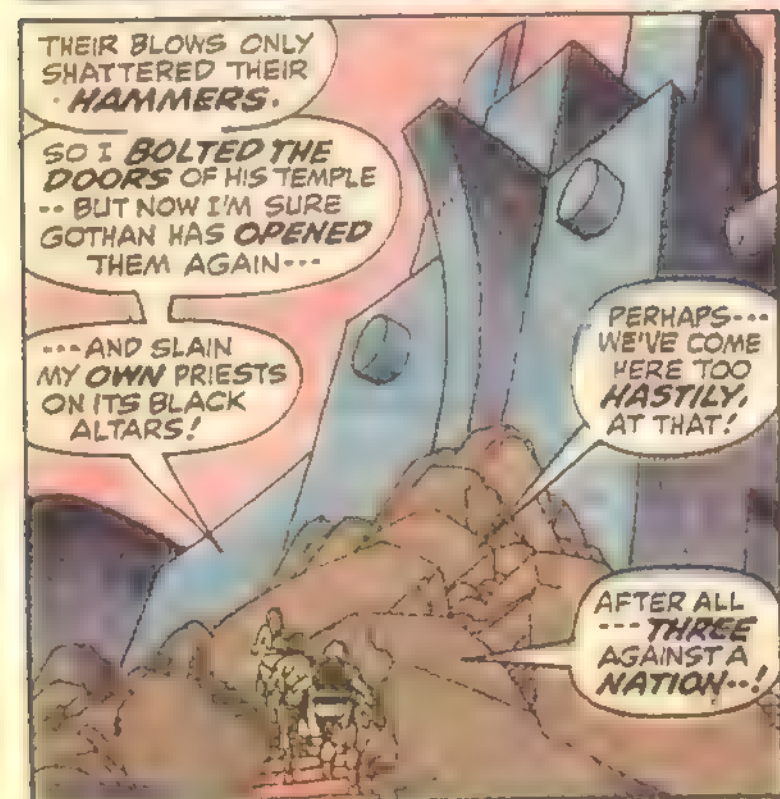
THEY'D
HAVE RISEN
AGAINST
ME, IF I'D
SLAIN
HIM.



HMMM-- YOUR
CITY HAS
MANY GODS.

AYE-- BUT THE
GREATEST OF ALL
IS GOL-GORTH,
THE GOD OF
DARKNESS.

ONCE, I FORBODE THE
PEOPLE TO WORSHIP HIS
IMAGE--- EVEN ORDERED
MY MEN TO DESTROY IT.



THEIR BLOWS ONLY
SHATTERED THEIR
HAMMERS.

SO I BOLTED THE
DOORS OF HIS TEMPLE
-- BUT NOW I'M SURE
GOTHAN HAS OPENED
THEM AGAIN---

--- AND SLAIN
MY OWN PRIESTS
ON ITS BLACK
ALTARS!

PERHAPS---
WE'VE COME
HERE TOO
HASTILY,
AT THAT!

AFTER ALL
--- THREE
AGAINST A
NATION--!



A NATION
OF FOOLS--
LIKE ALL
NATIONS!

SMITE THE
GATE-- THEN
STEP
BACK--

-- LEST
SOMETHING
FALL ON
YOU!

NO NEED.
ALREADY,
THE PORTALS
SWING
INWARD--!

CONTINUED AFTER NEXT PAGE.

SO THEY DO...

AND THEN, THE GIRL KYRIE BECOMES ONCE MORE THE GODDESS AALA... AND SPEAKS IN A VOICE MORE LOUD THAN ONE COULD HAVE EXPECTED...

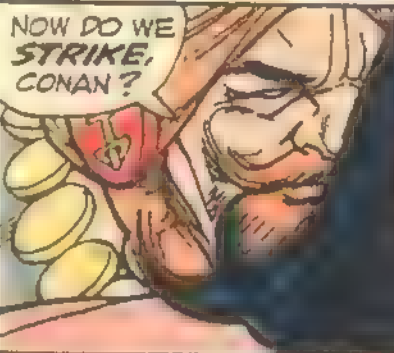
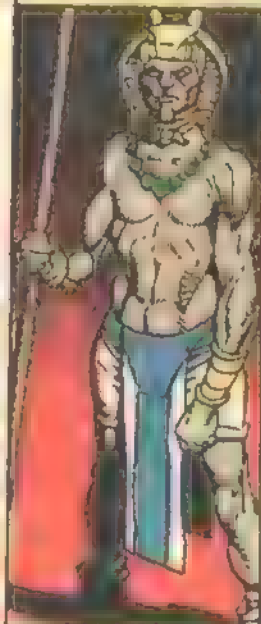
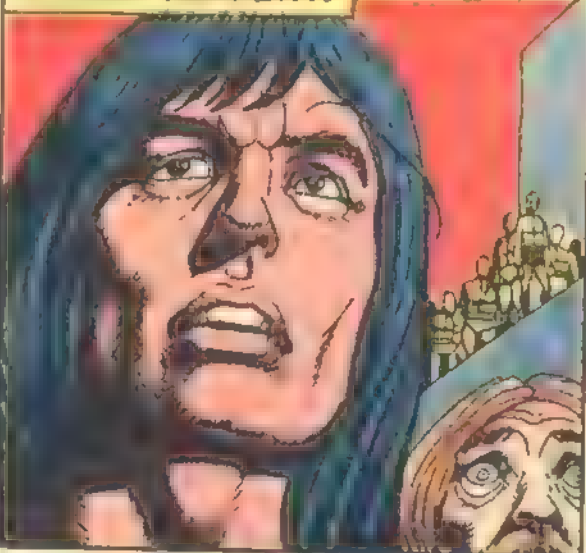
WELL, PEOPLE OF BAL-SAGOTH--?

-- WHAT WORDS HAVE YOU FOR THE GODDESS YOU MOCKED AND REVILED ??

BUT, IF THERE IS AN ANSWER AMONG THE FURTIVE MURMURS, CONAN DOES NOT HEAR IT. FOR, HIS GAZE IS RIVETED UPON A MAN-- VERY OLD, VERY LEAN --AND HIS SKIN CRAWLS, AS IF HE STARES INTO THE UNBLINKING EYES OF A GREAT SERPENT.

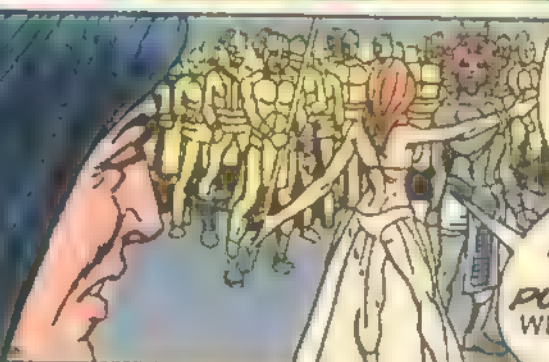
AND, IN THAT INSTANT, HE KNOWS THAT HE LOOKS UPON---

GOTHAN-- FIRST OF THE DARK GOD!



NOW DO WE STRIKE, CONAN?

IT IS HER MOVE-- AND BY CROM, SHE PLAYS THE GODDESS WELL!



SO, GOTHAN-- I SEE YOU WEAR THE JADE AMULET OF KINGSHIP.

YOU MIGHT AT LEAST HAVE LET YOUR PUPPET KING WEAR IT FOR A WHILE!

AND AS FOR YOU, SKA-- JACKAL THAT YOU ARE---

YOU DARE COME BACK HERE, WOMAN?

YOU WERE DOOMED BY DECREE-- PLACED BEYOND THE LAGOON--!

AND I HAVE RETURNED FROM THE REALM OF HORROR, DEAR SKA... --- WITH THOSE WHO SLEW AT MY COMMAND THE LIZARD-GOD GROTH-GOLKA!

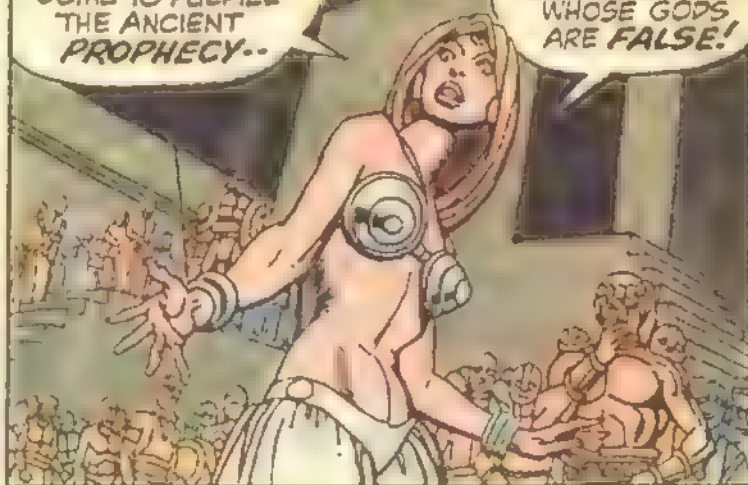


BEHOLD-- TWO MEN WHO HAVE COME OUT OF THE SEA!!

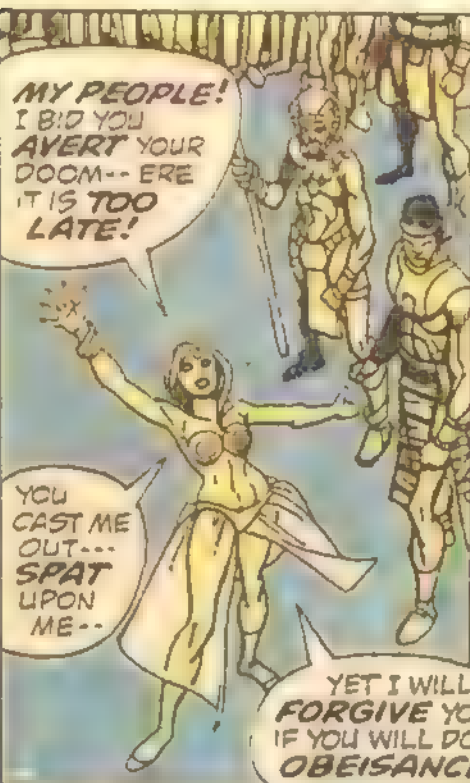
AT THESE FIERCE WORDS THE MURMUR BREAKS OUT AFRESH-- ANY SMALL THING MIGHT TURN THE TIDE EITHER WAY. THEN---

YES, MY CHILDREN-- YONDER STAND THE BEINGS WHO HAVE COME TO FULFILL THE ANCIENT PROPHECY--

--TO OVERTHROW THIS CITY, WHOSE PEOPLE ARE TRAITORS AND WHOSE GODS ARE FALSE!



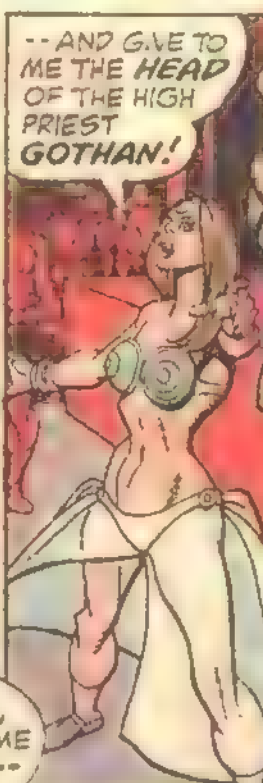
MY PEOPLE! I BID YOU AVERT YOUR DOOM-- ERE IT IS TOO LATE!



YOU CAST ME OUT-- SPAT UPON ME--

YET I WILL FORGIVE YOU, IF YOU WILL DO ME OBEISANCE--

-- AND GIVE TO ME THE HEAD OF THE HIGH PRIEST GOTHAN!

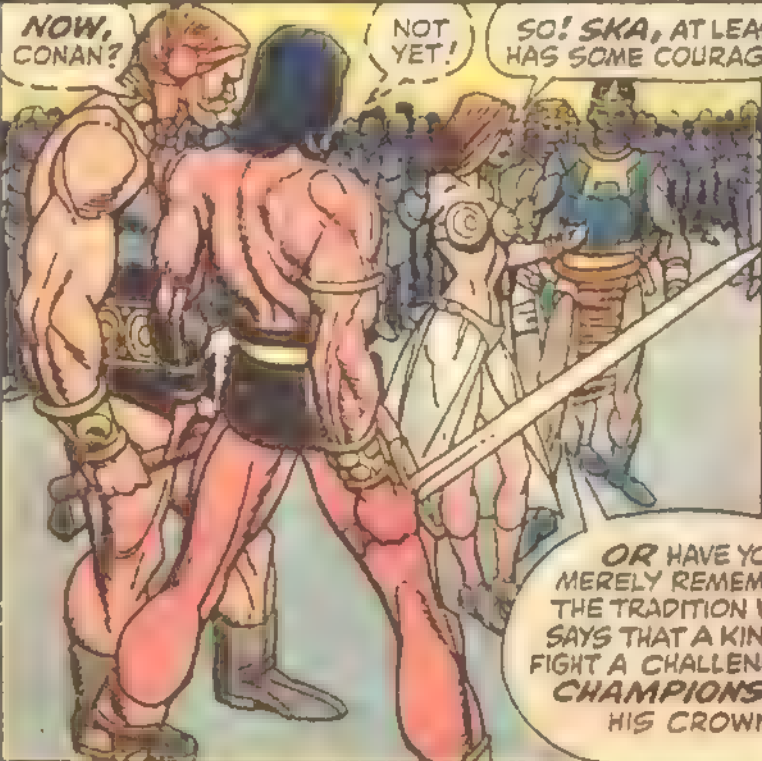


CHOOSE NOW! RISE UP AGAINST THIS DEVIL AND HIS BLASPHEMOUS GODS-- RESTORE TO AALA THE AMULET OF ROYAL POWER--

ELSE THE SUN WILL SET THIS DAY ON THE SILENT CRUMB-LING RUINS OF BAL-SAGOTH!



NOW, CONAN?



NOT YET!

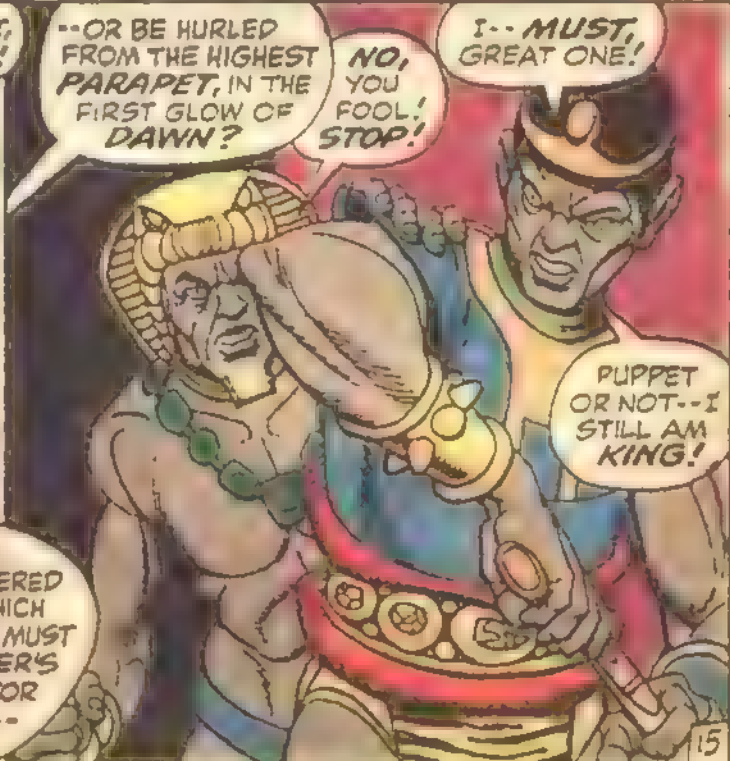
SO! SKA, AT LEAST, HAS SOME COURAGE!

--OR BE HURLED FROM THE HIGHEST PARAPET, IN THE FIRST GLOW OF DAWN?

NO, YOU FOOL! STOP!

I-- MUST, GREAT ONE!

OR HAVE YOU MERELY REMEMBERED THE TRADITION WHICH SAYS THAT A KING MUST FIGHT A CHALLENGER'S CHAMPIONS FOR HIS CROWN--



PUPPET OR NOT-- I STILL AM KING!

CONTINUED AFTER NEXT PAGE

FOOL! I DIDN'T PUT THE CROWN ON YOUR HEAD SO YOU COULD THROW IT AWAY ON SOME STUPID WHIM!

SAY AND DO NOTHING! LET ME HANDLE THIS!

AGREED-- SO LONG AS YOU SEE TO IT I KEEP CROWN AND HEAD!

I'VE GROWN RATHER FOND OF BOTH!

WELL, CONAN? WHICH OF US SLAYS THE DOG?

THAT IS FOR AALA TO DECIDE.

LITTLE MATTER-- SINCE EITHER OF YOU COULD DOUBTLESS CARVE SKA LIKE A BARNYARD BOAR.

AH, BUT GOTHAN KNOWS THE LAWS OF BAL-SAGOTH FAR BETTER THAN YOU, FALSE GODDESS!

YOU FORGET-- 'TIS WRITTEN THAT A FRIEND MAY FIGHT FOR THE KING, AS WELL-- IF HE ARISE UNBIDDEN!

SKA HAS NO FRIENDS-- NONE THAT YOU'VE NOT BOUGHT WITH TEMPLE GOLD! THUS-- AIEEE!

CROM'S DEVILS!

AYE, MAN-- SWEAR BY YOUR PAGAN GODS...

FOR, THE KING'S DEFENDER COMES!

VERTORIX COMES!

SLOWLY... SILENTLY... WITHOUT EVEN A CLANKING OF HIS WHOLLY-ARMORED BODY...

--THE ONE CALLED VERTORIX DESCENDS THE STAIRS--

--STRIDING LESS LIKE A WARRIOR... THAN AN EXECUTIONER!

AND IN THAT INSTANT... CONAN KNOWS WHICH OF THEM MUST FIGHT HIM!

STAND BACK, FAFNIR!

THIS ONE-- IS MINE!

ACROSS AN EVER-NARROWING ABYSS, A PAIR OF GRIM FORMS FACE EACH OTHER...

AND THE FIERY EYES OF GOTHAN BORE INTO THEM BOTH.

UNSPEAKING,
THEY CIRCLE
EACH OTHER,
LIKE TWO
GREAT CATS
AMID A JUNGLE
STILLNESS---

THE EYES OF ONE,
ABLAZE WITH IN-
STINCTIVE HATRED--

--THE OTHER
WITH EYES
LIKE FATHOM-
LESS BLACK
PITS!

THEN, SUDDENLY---

--IT BEGINS!

VERTORIX'S BLADE SINGS BY CONAN'S EAR--
CLOSE, YET SLOWED A BIT BY THE ARMORED
ONE'S SHEER WEIGHT.

YET, IT AVAILS
HIM NOTHING!

AND HE
TAKES
IT!

CROM!
ARE YOU
MADE OF
IRON?

THE CIMMERIAN SEES HIS CHANCE---

STILL NO ANSWER:
SAVE ONLY THE
WHISTLING OF THE
BIGGER MAN'S
SWORD!

BACK HE FORCES THE
BARBARIAN---BACK INTO
A COLD STONE CORNER--

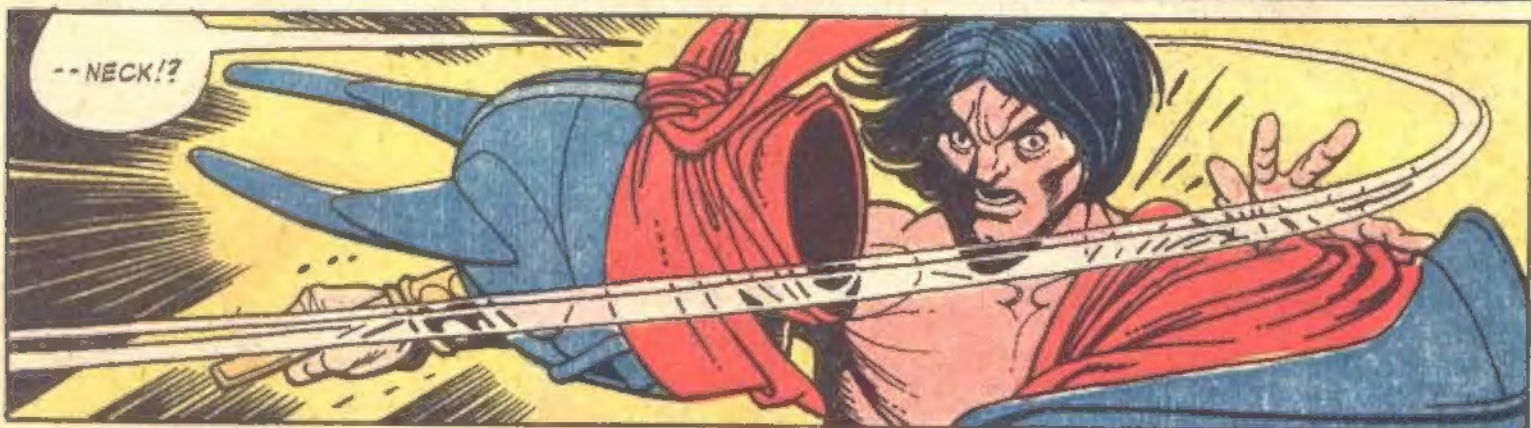
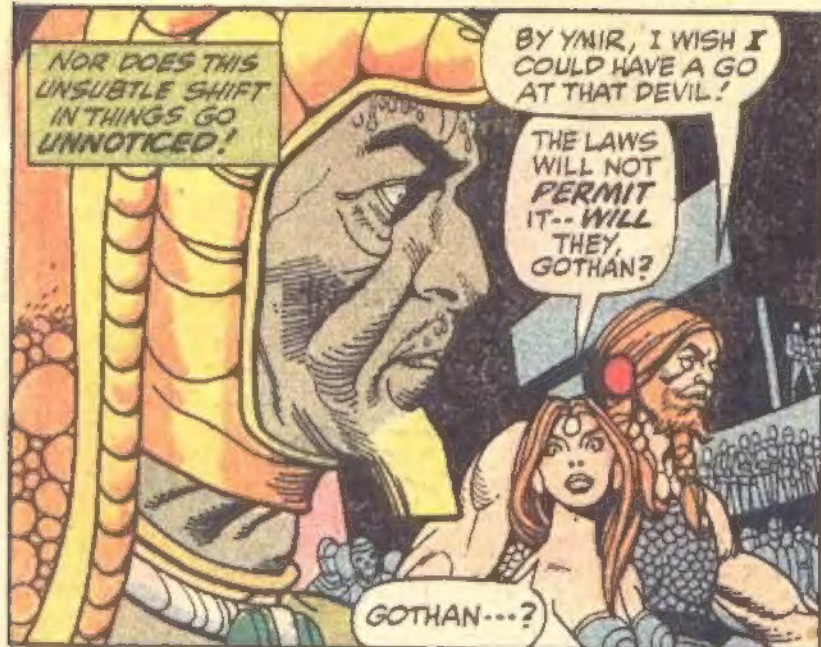
--FROM WHICH
THERE CAN BE
NO FLEEING!

BUT NOW, A PANTHERISH
RAGE SEIZES CONAN--
DROWNING EVEN THE
HATRED HE HAD FELT
BEFORE---

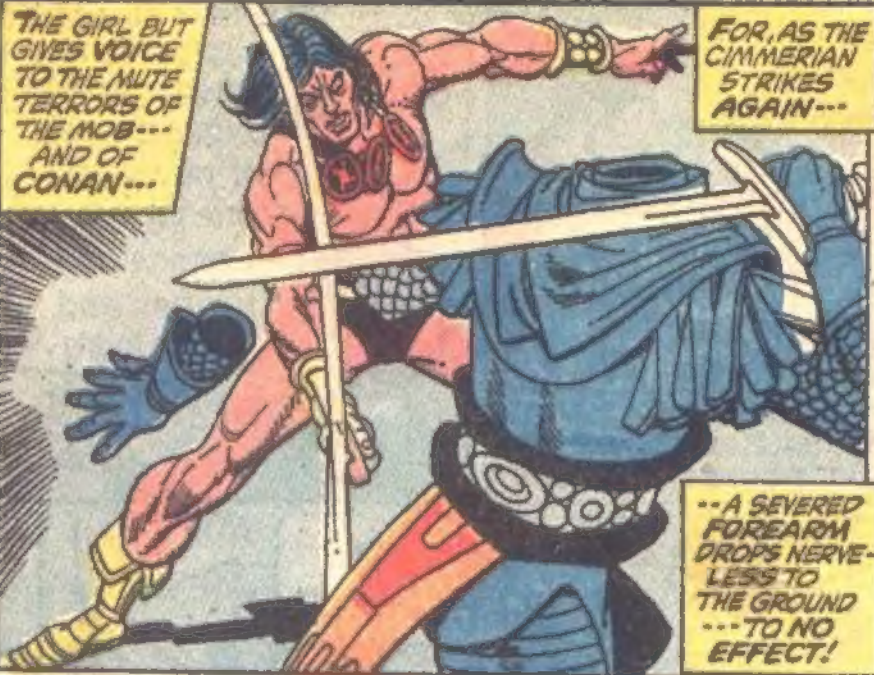
--TILL EVEN
HIS LOOMING,
MYSTERIOUS
FOE MUST
GIVE
GROUND--

HE STRIKES HARDER
--EVER HARDER--

--AS WORDLESSLY AS HE
HAD HELD IT!



THE GIRL BUT
GIVES VOICE
TO THE MUTE
TERRORS OF
THE MOB---
AND OF
CONAN---



FOR, AS THE
CIMMERIAN
STRIKES
AGAIN---

--A SEVERED
FOREARM
DROPS NERVE-
LESS TO
THE GROUND
---TO NO
EFFECT!



ONCE MORE,
VERTORIX
ARCS HIS
MIGHTY
BLADE---



-- SHATTERING
THAT OF HIS DUMB-
STRUCK, STAGGER-
ING FOEMAN---

CONAN FALLS--
AND SEEMS ROOT-
ED TO THE SPOT
BY HIS DEEP- FELT
FEAR OF THINGS
UNKNOWN---



THEN, EVEN AS THE HEADLESS WARRIOR RAISES HIGH
HIS SWORD, TO DELIVER THE DEATH BLOW---



--A CRIMSON-
TRESSED GOD-
DESS STRIDES,
TALL AND COLD-
BLOODED,
ACROSS THE
MARBLED COURT---

---THEN TURNS, TO
FACE BOTH THE
LEERING
GOTHAN---



---AND THE
GLARE OF
THE BLAZ-
ING SUN!



GOL-GORATH
PRESERVE ME!
THE SUN--IN MY
EYES! I--CAN'T
SEE!



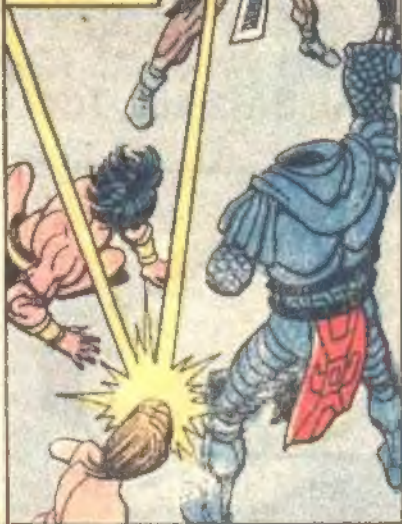
I CAN'T SEE!!



BUT CONAN CAN SEE---



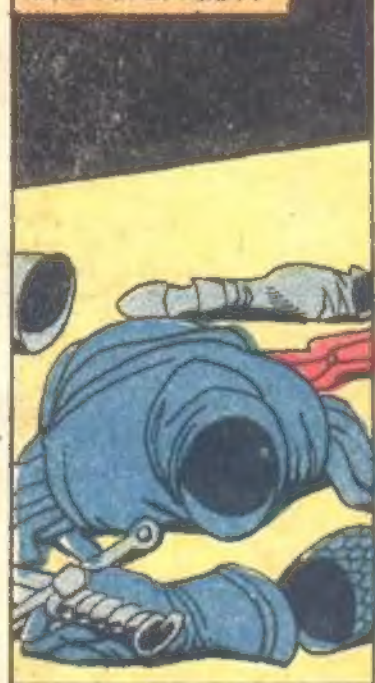
AND WHAT HE SEES IS GOTHAN, FORCED TO SHIELD HIS FIRE-FILLED EYES---



AND THAT, UNLIKE THE CLANGOROUS BLOW OF A SWORD---



--- DOES INDEED HAVE AN EFFECT!



VERTORIX--IS DEAD!

NO. HE WAS NEVER ALIVE.



GOTHAN'S GAZE MOVED HIM--- NOTHING MORE!

NOW, PARDON ME--FOR MY PEOPLE CRAVE THEIR GOD-DESS--

--AND THEIR QUEEN!



BUT-- GOTHAN, GIRL! WHERE'S GOTHAN-- AND SKA??

"STOLEN AWAY", SAYS THE GIRL--"TO BREED MORE TROUBLE IN THE SHADOWS!"



"FORGET THEM FOR NOW. YET, HEED YOU WELL--"

"WE'LL HAVE PLENTY OF THEM ANON!"

I DON'T DOUBT IT. WELL, NOW WHAT DO WE DO, CONAN?

WHY, WE CELEBRATE, MAN-- AND THOUGH I OWE MY VICTORY TO A GIRL, I'LL DO IT MOST LOUDLY OF ALL!



FOR, A DREAM ONCE TOLD ME I'D BE A RULER OF MEN ONE DAY---

--AND THIS PLACE WOULD MAKE AS GOOD A KINGDOM AS ANY!



FIN

PERHAPS YOU'LL FEEL DIFFERENTLY, BARBARIAN, WHEN YOU FACE---

THE THING IN THE TEMPLE!